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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1656
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0048
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1931
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DEPARTMENT FOR INL/C AND AF/C
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS
PRETORIA FOR DHS/ICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2017

TAGS: KCOR PREL PGOV CM

SUBJECT: CAMEROON CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIONS: RECENT
MEETINGS WITH GRC AND CANADIANS

REF: A. YAOUNDE 1160 NOTAL
1B. YAOUNDE 1068 NOTAL
1C. YAOUNDE 752 NOTAL

Classified By: Poloff Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 b and d.

11. (C) Summary and action request. The Ambassador's recent meetings with Cameroon Vice PM/Minister of Justice Amadou Ali and Canadian High Commissioner Jean Pierre LaVoie provided new information relevant to USG participation in Government of Cameroon (GRC) anti-corruption investigations (reflets). Ambassador Garvey is in Washington October 13-19 for the AF COM conference. While there, she will seek to meet with INL/C and other offices to obtain lessons learned and best practices from USG involvement in similar investigations in Africa and to determine what assets the USG may bring to bear to advance this effort in Cameroon. Post requests INL/C assistance to structure these conversations. End summary and action request.

Ambassador's 9/20 Meeting With Ali

12. (C) During the Ambassador's September 20 courtesy call (ref a), Ali raised almost immediately the subject of USG cooperation with the GRC's efforts to gather information relating to corrupt GRC officials (refs b and c). Ali asserted that the USG "knows all" about corrupt officials and pushed the Ambassador to share this information. When the Ambassador countered that, in fact, the process is more complicated than Ali suggested, Ali replied "the ball is in your court." Ali committed that the GRC would use any funds recovered in a transparent manner. Ali said a successful effort would act as a "vaccine" to prevent further corruption, and that the culture of "impunity" would disappear. Ali said that those who have stolen are "at peace" in thinking they do not have to fear prosecution.

13. (C) The Ambassador saluted the anti-corruption undercurrent in the September 7 cabinet shuffle, but emphasized that sustained commitment would be needed to make meaningful progress. Ali concurred, saying that President Biya had called him on the eve of the shuffle, saying he was prepared to go further in dismissing corrupt officials once he had more evidence (which, Ali implied, meant information from the U.S. and other foreign partners). Ali told Ambassador the shuffle removed "four of the most infamous"

corrupt officials:

--former Minister of Economy and Finance Polycarpe Abah Abah
--former Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Marie Atangana
Mebara
--former Minister of Public Health Urbain Awono Olanguena
--former Minister Delegate at the Ministry of Communication
Gervais Mendo Ze

¶4. (C) Ali said that despite public appearances, Mebara was "improper" and, while Secretary General at the Presidency, had been involved in the so-called "Albatross affair" in which millions were spent from the GRC treasury for the purchase of a Boeing presidential airplane. (Note: Biya stopped using the plane soon after receiving it when a technical problem raised concerns it would be used to assassinate him. End note.) Ali said that Olanguena had profited from his positions as Secretary General at the Ministry of Economy and Finance and as the Minister of Health.

¶5. (C) When asked about the decision to choose French-Cameroonian national Francis Dooh Collins and American Robert Horwath, both based in Geneva, as the GRC's agents for this investigation, Ali said that he had personally chosen Dooh Collins because he came with a good reputation from a well-known Cameroonian family. Ali said that his confidence in Dooh Collins grew when he learned (presumably from Dooh Collins himself) that the French Government was seeking to undermine Dooh Collins' efforts. Ali quickly hedged, however, that he would drop Dooh Collins if we or others had reason to be concerned about him. Post will report further on Collins' involvement and on the GRC's draft Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) request septel.

Canadians

¶6. (C) On September 21, Canadian High Commissioner Jean Pierre LaVoie and Canadian Poloff told Ambassador that the Canadian Government had not yet taken action on Dooh Collins' earlier approach for their assistance because of internal administrative constraints. The High Commission was preparing to write to Ottawa to request assistance with the investigation and first wanted to know what steps the USG had taken and what view the USG took of Dooh Collins. We explained that Dooh Collins had met with USG officials in CONUS, but that the USG had not yet provided Dooh Collins with any hard information, and that Dooh Collins had generally failed to impress us in terms of his professionalism or ability to contribute to the investigation. The Canadians expressed misgivings about Dooh Collins' involvement, noted that Dooh Collins had mentioned aspirations to be nominated as a GRC official, and worried about Dooh Collins' potentially hidden private agenda. Ambassador and Canadian High Commissioner agreed that the three diplomatic missions involved so far (US, Canada, UK) should meet to coordinate our response and should consider how best to approach other missions, especially the French.

Comment: Moving forward

¶7. (C) Ali's assertion that Biya is prepared to act but lacks the necessary evidence strikes us as unconvincing. The Presidency has substantial information about financial transactions in Cameroon. Auditors within the offices of State Control (the GRC's equivalent of the Inspector General) have recounted instances where their reports, filled with incriminating evidence, have been passed to the Presidency with no response until, in some instances, the cases are brought forward at moments opportune for the GRC's anti-corruption credentials. Rather, we perceive the GRC's priority in this effort to be the recovery of pilfered state funds, and the positive publicity that this would engender. Ali's "vaccine" comment is also somewhat misleading. Corrupt officials--including sitting ministers--have been dismissed

and thrown in jail before, with no apparent effect on the culture of corruption.

¶8. (C) Nevertheless, we believe that Ali is sincere in his desire to advance anti-corruption efforts in Cameroon, and we take as credible his assertion that this is a "window of opportunity" that will not last indefinitely. We believe that multiple USG interests are served by our continued and increased participation in this effort: first, there is the domestic imperative to investigate and follow-up on any crimes committed in the US or using USG institutions; second, there is the deterrent effect to prevent people from using US territory and banks in the future; third, there is the foreign policy impact -- whether or not we are able to locate looted funds on US soil, it behooves us to be able to say that we have fully participated in the GRC's anti-corruption efforts and to work with the GRC to improve its own capacity and understanding for anti-corruption, anti-money laundering operations. End comment.

NELSON